



Association of Administrators of Human Sciences
Board on Human Sciences - National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges

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**AAHS Comment on the Vision Statement of the President's Food
Safety Initiative**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Vision Statement. We commend the collaborative efforts of EPA, HHS, and USDA to address this important issue. I represent the Assoc. of Adm. of Human Sciences; deans of human sciences units in Land Grant Colleges and Universities. These deans are responsible for research, education, and extension programs in food science, nutrition, early childhood education, gerontology, hotel and restaurant management, dietetics, teacher education, among others. Food safety research and education is an important element in each of these fields.

The Vision Statement is comprehensive with the exception of adoption strategies and cost effectiveness. If the vision is to be achieved, there must be:

- 1) Research based strategies to avoid contamination which are SIMPLE TO ADMINISTER and COST EFFECTIVE IN TIME AND DOLLARS and
- 2) Strategies for prevention of foodborne illness must be based on a clear understanding of where the problems actually exist and on SCIENTIFIC STUDIES OF HANDLING AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES from producer to consumer.

Adoption of safe food practices all along the food chain is much more likely if these two criteria are met. Knowing what CAUSES contamination in production, handling, transport, storage and preparation is a central part of the matter. To eliminate or reduce contamination it is necessary to know the food handling practices of producers, **processors**, and consumers and what they are willing to do to assure safe food.

Admittedly, the latter information may be more difficult to obtain than controlled laboratory studies of pathogens and their functioning relative food sources. But if the vision for food safety is to be realized, there must be understanding of human factors of judgment and practice in food handling and management.

For example, do we know how overworked, underpaid, or non-English speaking food process workers may interpret safe handling guidelines or be committed to them? Do we know practices of day care workers in feeding infants and children? Do we know what the elderly do with food once the Meals on Wheels tray is

delivered?

A Michigan State University study of 3-5th graders found that 34% of the children made their own school lunches, 76% of the sample prepared afterschool snacks, but 72% did not know why meat should be refrigerated. (1)

These kind of data are essential if:

- Reasonable regulations are to be promulgated and compliance expected
- Food industries find the regulations/guidelines simple and cost effective enough to adopt
- Packagers and **processors** find guidance for developing new products and processes which further enhance food safety
- Readily adopted by consumers

A SHORT TERM GOAL would be to identify the avenues for obtaining data on food handling practices and constraints to adoption along all segments of the food chain. There are many professional organizations and educational institutions which would be available for this information or have the ability to obtain it.

A LONG TERM GOAL would be to provide research funding to document handling and management practices, develop and test intervention strategies, and to provide support for research Based educational programs for various segments of the food system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

(1) Findings from research conducted by Michigan State University in 1991 that surveyed more than 10,000 third graders to identify their food safety education needs.

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